

# A View to 2000: A Look Into the Minds of Business Leaders

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When the heads of many different companies share their views on the outlook for business in the final decade of the 20th century, the responses are sometimes predictable, sometimes surprising. In quest of these answers, RHR International consultants conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 100 business leaders — Presidents, CEOs and Chairpersons — from North American organizations with annual revenues ranging from \$6 million to \$28 billion. It was expected that they would have many dissimilar concerns. However, despite differences in size, region and industry, there were many similarities. In fact, two strong and telling trends emerged with implications for senior management and human resource executives to consider.

## ATTRACTING AND DEVELOPING TALENT

One significant issue identified was the shortage of quality people, particularly for top jobs. This is particularly true as major companies desire to be perceived as the employer of choice. Related to this problem was the lack of needed levels of education and training in the general labor pool. There was a concern that the current work force will not be able to keep pace with the changing

technical demands of their jobs. Additionally, an appreciation of growing diversity in the work place with increased cross-functional interrelationships was noted. The

most successful companies will be those that develop flexibility in managerial skills and perspectives adapting to the diverse work force. These issues point to the development of leadership skills in senior and other impactful positions. Specific skills cited as important included:

- **Strategic Thinking** — The ability to anticipate trends and shifting markets to create forward-thinking plans for organizational units, products and services.
- **Team Orientation** — The ability to work, often cross-functionally, with diverse groups on targeted projects using influence and persuasion over personal authority to accomplish tasks.
- **Personal Leadership** — The awareness and subsequent behaviors that demonstrate an understanding of how to create loyalty, a sense of dedication to the corporate mission and a sense of ownership and urgency to accomplish high impact outcomes.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability** — The ability to switch direction and perspective, often rapidly, based on new and often conflicting data to meet or stay ahead of shifting markets and industry changes. This requires being willing to reorganize and accept the interactive process changes that occur in organizations.
- **Strong Ethics and Integrity** — The unwavering willingness to make difficult decisions based on principle rather than personal gain.

## CREATING ADAPTIVE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES AND CULTURES

The development of a specific organizational structure and culture enabling organizations to meet the demands and challenges of the next decade is seen as

foundational. These demands include:

- **Enhancing operating efficiencies** — Including flattening the organizational structure with decreased bureaucracy, managing costs more carefully, enabling employees to wear multiple hats effectively, and evolving chameleon-like organizational structures that are more flexible and adaptive to changes in competition and the marketplace.
- **Managing computer information systems effectively** — The need to increasingly demonstrate the relationship of MIS data to organizational objectives and profitability. Information needs to be more targeted to help make business decisions more effective, not simply to generate data in isolation.
- **Creating and managing change successfully** — The need to be proactive and anticipatory rather than always operating "behind the curve" in making organizational shifts and changes.

Clearly, the ideal organization in the minds of many business leaders is to engineer a company that is creative enough to make change happen, not just respond to it. This requires management teams and key executives to become more proactive, flexible and creative. In addition, it will require executives to develop a management style that fosters and rewards these same orientations and behaviors in their people.

The human equation is a factor upon which all organizational success depends. Capable leadership is where it all begins. While the challenges of the decade are indeed formidable, having the right people in the right place to address them can be a key to success. Those companies that do the best job selecting, developing and retaining people have the most important resources, not only for meeting challenges, but also for capitalizing on opportunities. ■

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